FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
PROPOSED NINIGRET SALT MARSH RESTORATION PROJECT
CHARLESTOWN, RHODE ISLAND

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in partnership with the Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Council and other partners, is proposing to use a thin layer sediment deposition technique to raise the surface elevation of approximately 22 acres of tidal marsh in Charlestown, Rhode Island. The purpose of the proposed project is to restore degraded salt marsh habitat, improve marsh resiliency to climate change, and increase the area of high marsh within the marsh complex to support nesting birds and other wildlife.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulation [CFR] 1500-1508), and the implementing regulation (36 CFR 800). The EA analyzes the potential impacts of two alternatives on the human environment. These alternatives include a No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action (preferred alternative).

The Proposed Action involves the placement of dredge material on a portion of degraded marsh within the larger complex of tidal marsh habitats in Ninigret Pond. The objective of the project is to increase marsh surface elevations to support high marsh vegetation and improve habitat quality while increasing resiliency to sea level rise and future storm events. The proposed action consists of three related activities; estuarine channel/basin restoration and beach nourishment were both addressed during a prior EA and approval process in 2002. The third action currently being proposed is the restoration of salt marsh habitat through the use of dredge material.

The Proposed Action is expected to have negligible, temporary negative impacts to vegetated tidal marsh habitat with an overall positive impact in the marsh vegetation and associated fish and wildlife resources over time. Additional impacts are expected to be negligible and in some cases beneficial with regard to natural and cultural resources such as water and air quality, sediment chemistry, threatened and endangered species, and public recreation and safety.

During the permitting process, 30-day public comment periods were held for the Army Corps of Engineers Programmatic General Permit and for the State of Rhode Island Water Quality Permits. Additionally, there have been a number of public stakeholder meetings, including a series of presentations hosted by the Salt Ponds Coalition during the summer of 2015.

Based on review and evaluation of the environmental effects as presented in the EA, the Service has determined that the Rhode Island South Coast Habitat and Community Resiliency Project Phase I: Ninigret Salt Marsh Restoration Project is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. The project will result in a net ecological benefit

to 22 acres of tidal marsh in Ninigret Pond, and would complement ongoing interagency efforts to improve the ecological integrity of tidal marsh habitats and maintain habitat diversity for the fish and wildlife that depend on them along the Atlantic Coast. Therefore, the Service has determined that a Finding of No Significant Impact be issued for the proposed project.

26 October 2016
Date

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Reference:
Environmental Assessment, dated October 26, 2016